

Maggie Russell

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your background (for committee session)

I am a working class girl from Llanrumney, Cardiff.

I was brought up as part of a vibrant, wider family on my father's side from the Rassau in Ebbw Vale, and my mother's in North Yorkshire.

My family had no formal connection with the arts, and in today's language we would say they were from a lower socio-economic background.

In my teenage years, I came across Llanover Hall Youth Arts centre and Chapter and the experiences I had as a result, changed the story of my life.

I graduated from Warwick University in 1984 with a degree in Theatre Studies and more recently (2012) completed a Post Graduate Professional training as a Psychotherapist.

I am married with grown up children and step children.

I am dyslexic, and view it as an additional benefit, alongside recognising the specific adjustments it requires.

I live in a bilingual household and have worked on Welsh language projects however, I am not a Welsh speaker.

Q.1: What is your motivation for applying to be Chair of Arts Council of Wales ?

I am motivated by a lived experience that the arts can make a difference in people's lives and a professional observation of how powerful that difference can be culturally, socially and economically.

I am committed to widening access, nurturing talent and reflecting the culture and arts of Wales to all its people and beyond its borders.

One of the things that has attracted me to apply for this role is the policy work undertaken in these areas that can create a congruent framework for change including The Government's LGBTQ+ and Anti-racist Wales, Action Plans; and the ACW, Widening Engagement Action plan 2022-25.

I am at a moment in my life where I can harness my professional and personal experience, be fully available to engage in this role and, I hope to make a useful contribution in this role to the Arts and Culture in Wales.

Question 2: Why do you think you are well-suited for the role ?

I have over 35 years experience at all levels of the arts, cultural heritage and creative industries in a Welsh, UK, and international context as reflected in my full CV which I understand has been made available to the committee.

In brief, I began my professional career in the era of multiculturalism arts policy in Coventry in 1985, working at the grass routes of community engagement. I returned to Wales in 1987 where I worked for a number of companies, in various roles - Administrator, and marketing The Magdalena Project, JessicaCohen Dance, & the Made in Wales Stage Company. Arts consultant for The Sherman Theatre, Valleys Live; promoter & producer Flying Music (London), Chapter & Brith Gof (Goddoddin, Pax)

I was the founder director of The Point, a mixed economy venue, in what was then Cardiff Docks as it emerged into Cardiff Bay.

I have also worked as a senior leader in a corporate media organisation at BBC Wales, in various roles including Head of Talent; Chair of The Training Committee, Head of On Screen Diversity, and member of the senior management team. I was departmental manager for the Drama dept., which in addition to individual projects for BBC Network delivered radio drama for BBC Wales and Radio 4 and produced Pobol y Cwm for S4C. I also worked as an executive producer & producer on a wide variety of award winning productions including Food for Ravens, Belonging, Score, High Hopes, The Magicians House, Dirty Work, Tales from the Pleasure Beach, Define Normal, Care, Border cafe, Jack of Hearts & The Passion and more recently Keeping Faith.

This experience has equipped me with the necessary skills to operate as a senior leader in a complex, multi-disciplinary organisation, and given me the ability to operate in an environment of change and accountability which meets the requirements of the role of Chair of ACW.

Question 3: What are the 3 main outcomes that you want to achieve during your tenure ?

As Chair of ACW I will work to be ambitious, widen engagement, and put policy into action.

1. To deliver what has been set out in the documents and policies related to ACW and specifically the investment review and the process for that review.

2. To enable the broader policy work, informed by the Future Generations Act and the Welsh Government cultural contract; and the specific 6 key principles of the investment review, creativity, widening engagement, Welsh language, climate justice, nurturing talent and transformation to act as a catalyst, that empowers the arts sector to deliver an ambitious refreshed creative offer that reflects the ACW's priorities.

3. To support the ambition, energy and creativity of the sector so that we make, work and sustain a resilient arts ecology open to all and representative of all. One that surprises, engages & inspires us all.

Question 4: How will your work with individuals and organisations that support and promote the work of the Arts Council ?

My personal leadership style is to be actively curious, supportive, open and collaborative. Working in partnership, seeking clarity and respectful consensus are essential components at all levels of working creatively.

I will support the ACW to work collaboratively with the sector, wider partners and Government departments and policy agendas where the ACW experience and expertise may have something to offer, e.g. Health, Education, Creative Wales, and Cymraeg 2050.

However, I recognise not all conversations will be easy and ACW should not retreat from difficult conversations, it should seek to engage with creative tension, but always in a way that is open, respectful, and professional.

Throughout my career I have represented the case for the arts in professional and public forums, the press and media.

I am fully aware of the necessity of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

Question 5: How will you ensure that you maintain your independence from The Welsh Government, whilst also influencing and holding the government to account on areas of priority for arts and culture. ?

As a Royal Charter body and a charitable organisation, the ACW independence is fundamental and it is required to operate in accordance with a range of legally defined processes and responsibilities.

ACW also needs to deliver the agreed responsibilities as a Welsh Government sponsored body and develop policies and mechanisms to enable it to do this, ensuring

that all appropriate governance issues are attended to e.g. the spending of public funds, accountability, etc.

The ACW charter specifies that it is to “advise and co-operate” with government and “to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts;” and with both these statements in mind I recognise the ACW responsibility to seek opportunities to use its expertise, and research to contribute to, and where appropriate influence the wider agenda.

The overriding principle of how I would maintain independence whilst holding the government to account would be framed by the 7 Nolan principles of public life and recognising the separation between the function of the ACW chair and council and the ACW executive and staff.

And as stated in answer to question 4. I recognise not all conversations will be easy and ACW should not retreat from difficult conversations, it should seek to engage with creative tension, but always in a way that is open, respectful, and professional.

Question 6: How would you work with Senedd Members, Senedd Committees, and other stakeholders

My approach would be to be open to and foster ongoing, appropriate communication at all levels, with members, committees and stakeholders. I recognise the responsibility of the ACW chair is to listen, and learn as well as to lead, and that feedback is an important part of that process.

I am aware that there are different levels of accountability for the delivery of the work of the ACW to the government through the minister and the scrutiny of that work by the Senedd led by the culture committee.

I am also aware that part of my ongoing education will be to deepen my understanding of the interconnected relationship of all stakeholders, and my knowledge of the processes of Senedd members, and committees - I have no hesitation in seeking advice or asking questions.

